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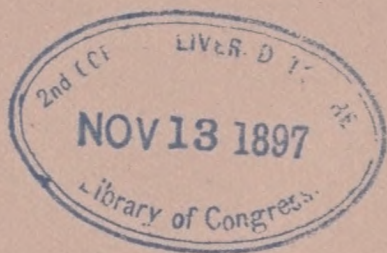
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The Love Adventures  
OF  
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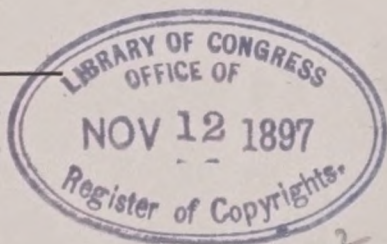
# The Love Adventures

OF

## LOLA MORTZ.

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BY  
M. HOLLAND.



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# THE LOVE ADVENTURES

... OF ...

## LOLA MORTZ

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There never had been a time, apparently, when he had not been "old" Brown." But in point of fact, he was not so old even now. Many a man beyond him in years still bore an appearance of middle-aged vigor.

But George Brown had always shunned that contact with men which conduces to such healthful vigor.

A recluse and scholar, a kind, shy, absent minded man he had ever been, and—until recently, at least, one would so have said—ever would remain.

His slight bent figure and his mild blue eyes in the clear-cut, clean-shaven face were familiar to all children in the village, who liked him for the sundry small "tips" he was wont to bestow upon them, and whose mothers would observe that, being such a good man and so fond



of children, it was a pity old Brown had never married.

At these remarks Mrs. Smith, his housekeeper, would screw up her nose in contempt.

"It's just that's thinkin' of marryin'! And who's he to marry? Some meddlin' widow that would be for rulin' him around at his time of life? Or some highty-tighty girl that 'ud lead him a dance, a-racketin' him about. I guess not!"

"Well," remarked one of Mrs. Smith's cronies one day, "he's going to Mortzs' pretty often, and there's the niece there now, the one they call by that outlandish name—Lol—Lola—or somethin'."

And true it was that George Brown was going to Mortzs' very often of late; and also true, though he himself poor man, had been a long time in finding it out, that what he went for was the sight of Lola Mortz's sweet, flower-like young face and her pensive violet eyes.

When he did make the discovery the experience was an extraordinary one to Brown. And that which made it extraordinary was that it was the first of its kind.

In the beginning he felt as though it were almost a sacrilege for him to be going there with this acknowl-

edged feeling for the young girl in his heart. But Lola had come to count upon his visits, and his gentle kindness made a little sunshine for her, poor child!

For the Mortzs, though worthy enough people in their way, were perhaps a little hard on this young daughter of a brother who had always been improvident and unlucky, and had died at last, leaving nothing behind him but this pale-faced slip of a girl for them to care for.

And so for months George Brown had walked over to the Mortzs' place almost every day, sometimes with a book for the girl, sometimes with a little bunch of sweet-smelling flowers.

And she would generally be waiting for him with a glad smile of welcome on her lips, which repaid him for everything. In the self-abnegation of his honest, reverent heart, George Brown would have been content to hold this place of an old, tried, and kind friend towards the young girl to the end of her chapter, doubtless would have done so, had he not, on coming upon her suddenly one day, found her in tears.

Lola had tried to conceal her emotion quickly, but it was too late, and at sight of George Brown's kind,



questioning eyes she had broken down again, and sobbed out the story of her trials.

It was nothing very definite, perhaps, but Brown knew that this delicate young plant was pining away for the lack of sunshine and a fostering care. And it seemed irremediable, as she had no other friends, except in one way.

At the thought of this one way George Brown's heart beat quickly. He cast a glance at the young creature who sat beside him, with her hands clasped listlessly in her lap, and the sad eyes seeming to look out into a joyless future, and quite suddenly he spoke,

He could give her a comfortable home, and care, and—ah, how much love!—at least.

When, a couple of hours later, he walked homewards towards the pretty house which Mrs. Smith's care kept in a state of order which could only be adequately described by her own term of "apple-pie," it seemed to George Brown as though all the world were changed.

Surely the sky was very blue that day; he never remembered to have seen it so blue, and the sunshine was unusually brilliant, and what happy faces people had as they passed him!



When he got home, Mrs. Smith was waiting for him in a clean cap. He passed in, and then looking into the broad expanse of her hard honest countenance with a smile that lit up all his mild thin features, he said :

"You must congratulate me, Mrs. Smith. You've been faithful to my service many years, and you'll like to know, I'm sure, Miss Mortz is going to be my wife."

At the time Mrs. Smith found nothing to say but "Good Heavens!" which exclamation she delivered herself of with considerable force.

And it was just as well that her breath failed her after this, for the next outburst would assuredly have been:

"Well, I hope you won't have no cause to rue the day nor the deed!"

Considering the disparity in years, it did seem to Mrs. Smith that this result could not fail to come about.

When all was settled, and Lola, by George Brown's wish, had come to the solitary old house in order to see if there were any changes she would wish to make in it ere she became its mistress, Mrs. Smith took her by the hand, and looking into the fair, lily-like face, observed:

"Well you look like a good one, and I'm going to hope

that you are. The man you are going to marry ain't just as young as another, maybe, but you kin get down on your knees every night and thank God for givin' you such a good husband. There ain't another such man outside of Chrisendom," concluded Mrs. Smith, who was something of a Mrs. Partington in her way.

"Yes, I know he is very, very good," said Lola softly and grateful.

"And I hope you're properly fond of him," added Mrs Smith with a keen look of enquiry.

And Lola, opening wide her violet eyes, that were like a child's for candor and innocence replied with a certain surprise:

"O, yes! Of course I am fond of Mr. Brown." The eyes filled with tears. "He has been my kindest friend."

The two then, a friendly relation being thus established, went over the house together.

"She's a good, modest girl, I'm thinking," was Mrs. Smith's mental comment, when Lola's slim young figure had tripped down the garden-walk. "I hope it'll last. If ever any man deserves a good wife, he does."

Meanwhile Lola had reached the gate. It was late summer, and she and George Brown were to be married in the autumn.

There was a brilliant sunset in the west and Lola, in whose nature there was an instinctive thirst for beauty in every form, turned her head to look in that direction.

In this way she ran against a stalwart masculine figure, which, at that instant, approached the gate.

She started back and glanced up into a pair of merry, handsome blue eyes, bent in some surprise upon her.

The owner of the eyes stepped aside and raised his hat in ready courtsey, and Lola, with a slight inclination of her head, passed on.

She walked home very straight. Her cheeks were warm, though she was not conscious of it.

Just before entering the house she paused, and glancing backward, murmured to herself:

"I wonder who that young man could have been?"

The young man in question had, on his side, looked very unreservedly after Lola's young figure as it passed up the long village street. And his comment upon the meeting had proved much more outspoken and definite than hers.



"By Jove! Wonder how so much youthful bloom and radiant beauty came to be issuing from my venerable old uncle's abode. I'll have to look into this. I declare, there is the old fellow this moment, as I'm a living sinner!"

He started forward, George Brown, coming toward him, stopped and stared.

"Well, uncle, forgotton me quite, have you?" laughed the young man.

"Charlie—Charlie Brown! Bless my soul! Welcome, boy, welcome! Come in, come in!" and a minute later the young fellow was being presented to Mrs. Smith.

"My deead brother's son, Mrs. Smith," said George Brown with a gentle solemnity. "I was very fond of brother Charles. He was the handsomest of the family, and," with a gentle smile lighting up all his mild face, "it seems to me that Charlie has taken after him!"

Charlie laughed good humoredly.

"And now tell me, uncle, who the young lady is with whom I had the pleasure of an encounter at the gate, just now. She is as fair as the morning, and has eyes like blue violets."

Before George Brown could make any reply, Mrs. Smith broke in curtly:

"That was Miss Lola Mortz, as is to marry your uncle sir. Excuse the liberty o' me answering."

"The deuce!" Charlie exclaimed within himself.

George Brown smiled a little shyly.

"I'm much too old to be thinking of marrying so young a girl, I suppose you are thinking, my boy; but you see she hasn't many friends, and I'll try to make the child happy."

"And indeed you ain't too old to marry anybody," cried Mrs. Smith with indignant force.

"Never mind, Mrs. Smith; that will do," remonstrated George Brown, and Mrs. Smith, taking the mild reproof less gently than it had been administered, bounced from the room.

"I don't like the looks of that whipper-snapper," she confided to herself when outside. "He'll make trouble yet, with his curly hair and his big shoulders, and the swagger of him. And Mr. Brown to be appologising to him or the likes of it, because he's to marry the girl he's chosen!" And Mrs. Smith's soliloquy ended with a sniff.

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As the shorter autumn days came over the land, some gray and bleak, and fraught with that sadness that accompanies the dying of the year, some gorgeous with the red and gold of maples and blackberry vines, and yet sad, too, and filled with that nameless, indescribable feeling of premonitions inseparable from the season, there was much hurrying to and fro in "old Brown's" quiet house, now quiet no longer.

All was being put in readiness for the young bride and the neighbors found an exhaustless topic of conversation in appropriate discussions of the wall-paper, and new furniture, and changes here and additions there, which were being made to ensure her comfort and happiness.

"Seems as though he couldn't do enough for the girl. And she ain't been ever made much of at home, Lola Mortz ain't. It'll all be new to her, I guess. Well, old Brown's a good man—no better ever lived."

"All the same Lola ain't looking very happy," remarked one ancient dame shaking her head. "I see her yesterday. She was as white as chalk. I thought she looked very down."

George Brown, happily unconscious of such comments



as the last, was wending his way towards the Mortzs' house.

As he walked, the tall slight figure bent forward a little, less from the weakness of age than from the habit contracted during many years spent in poring over books, the mild eyes fixed upon the ground; he was meditating whether there were still any little things which Lola might like of which he had not thought.

This had been his sole preoccupation for weeks. God had been very kind to him. He had thrown this beautiful young in his path for him to love. He accepted the boon reverently, with a sort of fear. The feeling of disparity in his years and hers was always before him. All his efforts were concentrated on a perpetual striving to atone to her, as it were, for this difference.

So lost in thought was he as he neared the strip of ground that surrounded Lola's home, that he at first did not notice the sound of voices coming in suppressed tones from behind the high hedge that screened those within the garden from the gaze of the passers-by.

But he stopped very suddenly, for he thought all at once that he heard Lola speak, and was it possible? yes, she was sobbing.

"No, no, don't plead with me, please," the girl was saying in a low agonizing whisper. "Go—please, go. It is of no use. I must not listen to you. I owe him everything—everything!"

"You don't owe him the mere form of an allegiance when your heart is given to someone else, darling. Lola dearest," the pleading passionate voice rang out, "you do love me—you cannot deny it. Then you belong to me, not to him."

What had come over the world in this one short minute? The sunshine seemed to have been blotted out and a cold wind sprang up and lifted the dead leaves that strewed the road and swept them up into little heaps.

George Brown stirred blindly. He touched his forehead with his hand once or twice and turned back whence he had come. He did not quite realise at first just what happened. He knew afterward that he had been dazed there for awhile.

He repeated to himself once or twice slowly:

"Yes, of course. Charlie loves her and she loves him. How could they help it? It is natural—natural. I ought to have known this before!"

"Good Heavens!" cried Mrs. Smith when she saw his face. "What has happened?"

"Nothing—nothing!" And yet he seemed to have grown quite old—really old—since he had left the house an hour before.

He went into his room and locked the door.

A little later he came out and asked whether young Brown had returned. The latter who had just came in heard the inquiry and stepped forward.

"I wanted to see you, sir," the young man said. "I have—I got a letter this morning which—which will compel me to leave you sooner than I thought. In fact I think of going home tomorrow morning."

George Brown bent a long look on the young man's face. It was very pale and haggard.

"Bless her!" thought he who indeed was an old man. "She was faithful, poor child!"

There was a pause, and then he said, very quietly and kindly:

"No need for you to go, Charlie. I know the reason for your wanting to leave here. I did not mean to be an eavesdropper, my boy, but I overheard some words



you and Lola spoke today in the grounds down by the Mortzs'."

"You—you heard," stammered the young man, reddening furiously.

"And I want you to stay, Charlie. Do you understand? If Lola loves you—that is enough."

"Uncle! May God bless you for this! I—I don't know what to say."

And so it was settled. Very quickly, very quietly. George Brown would not have the original wedding-party put off—would not alter any of the dispositions he had made for that event. Everything was to be the same—only the bridegroom was to be another.

Never once did he break down. When Lola, bursting into tears, cried:

"You are too good to me. I do not deserve so much. I deserve nothing from you but contempt," he hurriedly whispered:

"Hush, hush, child! Never say that! It is better so—far better. Youth loves youth—it is natural. I should have known you could not have loved an old fellow like me, dear. It was just an old man's romance—over now. And you and Charlie must be happy."

That was the day before the wedding.

The next day George Brown stood upon the doorstep, with a smile upon his face, and saw the young people drive off.

When the honeymoon was over they must return, he had said, and his home was to be theirs.

"A little young wife about us will do us both good, Mrs. Smith," he told the faithful old woman who had stood by and witnessed all these changes with a furious face. Nor was it less furious now.

"If you live to see it," she said within herself grimly.

But she knew not that her soul would prove so good a prophet.

One night, a few days before Charles Brown and his wife were expected back, she was hastily summoned to his bedside.

The doctor shook his head. He was afraid there was nothing to be done. All through the hours of the night they watched.

Towards dawn George Brown opened his eyes, groped feebly with his hands and murmured: "Lola."

A moment later Mrs. Smith raised a piteous cry :

“Oh, doctor, he was the kindest, gentlest soul that ever lived, and now he is dead!”

Poor George Brown! Poor “old Brown!” He had taken the Love Experience that had come to him so late nearer to heart than anyone knew or dreamed, and with its death the slender thread that held him to life had snapped in two.

















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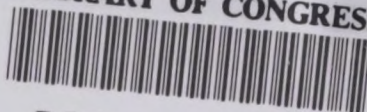
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